



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Coulee Baton Project receives recognition

BATON ROUGE – Taking responsibility for the environment and environmental pollution has been the focus of an ongoing project in the microwatershed of Coulee Baton in Vermilion Parish. The project is an effort to identify water quality problems and to find solutions. The project involves a wide range of the stakeholders in the watershed, which provides for a team approach to identifying and solving water quality problems.

The Coulee Baton project received the National Collaborative Award from the National Association of Conservation Districts at their annual convention in New Orleans. The Collaborative Conservation Award recognizes conservation districts that exemplify innovative, collaborative conservation efforts by drawing upon various partnerships, utilizing diverse funding sources and/or conducting a wide range of projects to address local conservation resource needs. The project has also been featured in two National Association of Conservation Districts' national publications.

The project is funded under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act by the Environmental Protection Agency and administered at the state level by DEQ. One phase of the project provides cost share of 60 percent to residential homeowners in the microwatershed, who want to upgrade their septic systems. The Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District has held six public meetings and a field day to demonstrate the types of approved septic systems for homeowners. More than half the homes in the watershed discharge directly into public drainages with no secondary sewage treatment. Homeowners that want to upgrade their system can get 60 percent cost share up to a maximum of \$4,000 to repair or replace their systems.

A second area of emphasis in the Coulee Baton microwatershed project is encouraging agricultural producers and other landowners to apply best management practices, including improved watering systems for cattle and cross-fencing to protect water courses. The partners are working with rice producers on Best Management Practices to decrease sediment and stream loading when irrigation water is released. Cost-sharing for this portion of the work is provided by U S Department of Agriculture's Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

The Louisiana Master Farmer Program and its partners are an integral part of the project and farmers in the area are encouraged to participate. This project also has a voluntary intensive educational component that seeks to achieve conservation gains without regulation. Resources from the National Resource Conservation Service, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and LSU AgCenter are being utilized to ensure the success of the project.